Minnesota State Story

2005 Minnesota

NRCS

Helping People
Help the Land

Minnesota State Story

Dear Friends in Conservation:

On behalf of the entire Minnesota Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff and partners I proudly present this 2005 Minnesota State Story. This story covers one fiscal year, from October 1, 2004 to September 30, 2005.

NRCS celebrated its 70th Anniversary in April. For the past 70 years NRCS has been a partner in conservation. Numerous positive examples exist where conservation partners have made contributions on our Minnesota landscape.

Glacial Ridge Project was highlighted at the President's Conference on Cooperative Conservation in August. I was proud to represent Minnesota NRCS on sharing the highlights of this important northwest Minnesota Project. Glacial Ridge is the largest wetland restoration project in North America. People partnering together made Glacial Ridge Project a reality. A special thank you to the Conservation Partnership for making this happen!

Additionally, Minnesota NRCS is fortunate to have such a strong commitment to Local Work Groups. These local groups set conservation priorities and address what the local resource concerns are. Our strong commitment to conservation has moved Minnesota into a position of being one of the top leaders in Federal conservation programs.

NRCS is helping people help the land. Together, we can, and will, continue to carve our accomplishments into the landscape of Minnesota. I look forward to continued conservation results in the great state of Minnesota. Together, with your cooperation and commitment to conservation we will paint the Minnesota landscape with more conservation practices being planned, implemented and successfully maintained!

Sincerely,

\\S\\

WILLIAM HUNT
State Conservationist

Vision

A productive Minnesota in harmony with a sustainable environment

Mission

The mission of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is to provide USDA technical leadership, working in partnership with local, state and other federal conservation agencies and organizations, to help people conserve, improve and sustain our natural resources.;

NRCS
Helping others help the land

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Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

CTA is a broad program which encompasses the majority of the work NRCS does. Work items such as the agency's infrastructure, training, accountability, technical references, state-specific Field Office Technical Guides and engineering are all part of CTA.

Additionally, conservation compliance activities such as highly erodible land determinations, wetland delineations and determinations are considered ongoing CTA work.

NRCS is working with Hmong farmers in the Twin Cities Metropolitan
Region to help them develop conservation plans and successfully implement conservation practices which are suited to their unique small farming operations.

Merlin Bartz, Regional Assistant Chief for the NRCS Central Region checks over the farm implements being used on the Yang farm in Dakota County.

Clamps connecting cable concrete mats on a grade stabilization

The demand for CTA continues to grow in Minnesota. CTA is the foundation for all of NRCS's conservation activities. This is carried out in cooperation with our 91 Soil and Water Conservation Districts throughout the State. This effort has created a seamless delivery of local, State and Federal conservation programs.

Students learn about the use of soils in Watonwan County.

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Performance Measure Accomplishments for MN NRCS -FY 2005

Agricultural Lands Managed for the Protection and Enhancement of Habitat for Species with Declining Populations **(Acres)**	**44,607**
Agricultural Lands Treated for which Wildlife Habitat is the Primary or Secondary Resource Concern **(Acres)**	**75,261**
CNMP Applied **(Number)**	**127**
CNMP Written **(Number)**	**143**
Conservation Plans for Cropland Written **(Acres)**	**590,229**
Conservation Plans for Grazing Land Written **(Acres)**	**51,028**
Grazing land with Conservation Applied to Protect the Resource Base **(Acres)**	**34,720**
Irrigation Efficiency Improved **(Acre-Feet)**	**5,574**
Reduction in the Acreage of Cropland Soils Damaged by Erosion **(Acres)**	**326,783**
Soil Erosion Reduced **(Tons)**	**2,509,782**
Watershed or Area-Wide Conservation Plans Developed for Water or Air Quality **(Acres)**	**2,445,405**
Watershed or Area-Wide Resource Plans, Studies or Inventories for Flood prevention or mitigation **(Number)**	**1**
Watershed or Area-Wide Resource Plans, Studies or Inventories for Water Conservation and Water Supply **(Number)**	**1**
Wetlands Created, Restored or Enhanced **(Acres)**	**17,988**

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Our People

NRCS at Work in Minnesota

NRCS employees are highly skilled in many technical and scientific areas. Our Minnesota NRCS employees offer on-site technical assistance and they understand local site-conditions. NRCS's primary mission is to help private landowners plan and use good conservation practicies on their land. NRCS has an office in nearly every Minnesota county. Assistance is available in a nearby USDA Ag Service Center location for those desiring some natural resource assistance in disciplines such as:

Agronomy
Biology
Cartography
Cultural Resources
Economics
Engineering
Forestry
Geographic **I**nformation **S**ystems
Geology
Hydrology
Resource **C**onservation & **D**evelopment
Soil **C**onservation
Soil **S**cience
Water **Q**uality
Wetland **S**cience

A summer orientation conservation tour was held for the 2005 summer students.

William Hunt, State Conservationist , helped celebrate the 70 years of Soil and Water Conservation in Minnesota on April 27, 2005.

http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov

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The Earth Team

The Earth Team volunteers in Minnesota continue to help in our priority conservation efforts. In 2005, volunteers contributed **89,616** hours in Minnesota NRCS offices. The Earth Team program is the voluntary arm of NRCS and continues to be a vital part of the quality service that is delivered to farmers and land users in Minnesota.

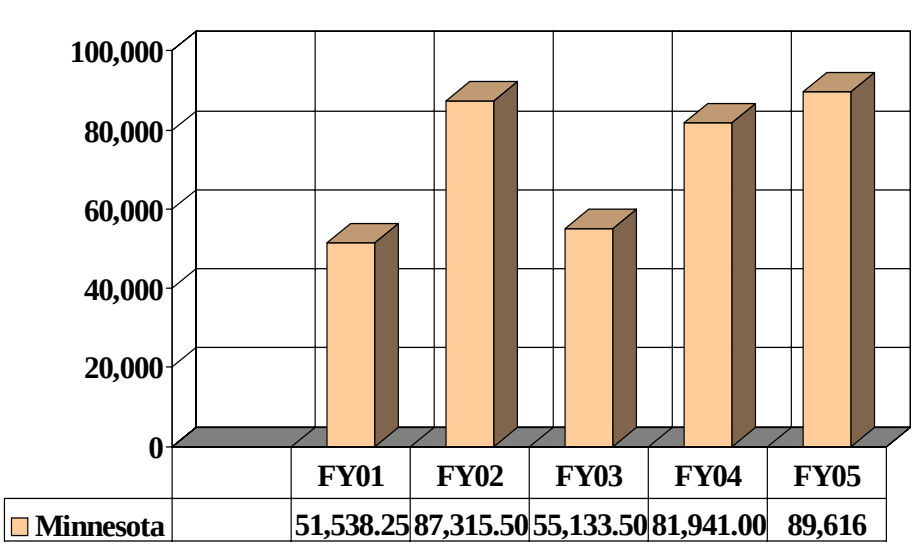
Earth Day 2005 was celebrated at both Glacial Ridge near Mentor and at the Straight River Marsh near Ellendale. Both of these events were well attended and provided NRCS with the opportunity to tell our natural resources story to both the urban and rural publics that we serve.

USDA Agriculture Secretary, Mike Johanns and Governor Tim Pawlenty attended the Earth Day event in Ellendale. Earth Team volunteers particpated in a tree planting event with the Secretary of Ag, Minnesota Governor and State Conservationist, William Hunt.

A *special thank you* to all who have helped in many ways to make the volunteer program a success.

Secretary Johanns with Students on Earth Day.

Volunteer Hours by Fiscal Year



	FY01	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05
Minnesota	51,538.25	87,315.50	55,133.50	81,941.00	89,616

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Conservation Security Program (CSP)

Minnesota had **six** CSP Watersheds during FY 2005: **Blue Earth, Red Lake, Redeye, Redwood, Root and Sauk Watersheds.**

L-R Standing: Timothy Wilson, Steve Sellnow, Chuck Uphoff, William Hunt and Merlin Bartz. L-R Seated: Tom and Theresa Loxtercamp. The Loxtercamp's signed Minnesota's first CSP contract on July 28, 2005.

Regional Assistant Chief, Merlin Bartz announced at a National CSP event on July 28, 2005 that USDA will offer 564 CSP contracts across the State. These 2005 contracts being offered translate into more than $4.2 million dollars in long-term commitment to conservation on Minnesota farms over the next ten years. CSP participants are conservation innovators. What they do today will lead to additional environmental benefits for the Nation as they share their knowledge of conservation with others.

Minnesota CSP Quick Facts for 2005

Watershed Acreage:	**3,594,700 acres**
CSP Participation	
Sought information on CSP:	**4,900**
Attended workshops:	**3,500**
Eligible applicants	**564**
Total Contracts for CSP	**564**
Total 2005 Payments	**$4.2 Million**
Tier 1 Payments	**$3.1 Million**
Tier 2 Payments	**$944,000**
Tier 3 Payments	**$170,000**

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Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Conservation Buffers – Modern practices for production agriculture! Minnesota's new Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) will help protect water quality and remove marginal flood prone lands from production.

The USDA buffer initiative continued to pick up momentum into 2005. Farm producers remain enthusiastic about adapting their land to include conservation buffers. In 2005 Minnesota producers established over **15,000 acres** of land into buffer practices which provide environmental benefits that include improving water quality, reducing soil erosion and providing habitat and nesting cover for wildlife. What these producers are also finding is that buffers also benefit modern production agriculture and can make your farming operation more convenient, more efficient and more profitable!

Conservation Buffers enrolled into CRP earn annual rental payments and they can also:

Straighten Field Boundaries
Eliminate Endrow Compaction
Provide Turn Areas
Generate Income on Areas Lost to Floods
Meet Herbicide Label Setbacks
Reduce Machinery Damage

Conservation Buffer areas earn annual income payments by enrolling eligible land into the Continuous CRP program. In most cases these payments are competitive with cash rent and can more than equal the anticipated return from farming the land.

Conservation Buffers can straighten field boundaries. Installing buffers next to streams, wetlands and drainage ditches can make your farming operation more convenient. Buffer strips can allow you to square up field boundaries which make planting, harvesting and spraying easier and more efficient. Reducing inconvenient point rows means fewer turns and more efficient planting and harvesting operations.

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CRP and CREP payments provide a dependable source of income on areas subject to loss from frequent flooding.


Flood prone areas offer potential for buffer installation

CRP payments are competitive and provide a stable return compared to the potential income from farming marginal flood prone lands along creeks and streams. In some years these marginal areas may provide no return due to flooded crops.

Buffer practices can serve as turn areas in some instances. Having turn areas avoids the need to plant end rows where crop yields can often be lower due to soil compaction. Buffer areas can also provide season long access to remote fields allowing you to get to these areas to scout, spray, or harvest. All these factors add up to greater convenience for modern farm operators, convenience and efficiency, which can improve your bottom line. Custom applicators especially like the benefits of spraying fields with straight boundaries and setbacks from water courses.


A turn area provides buffer benefits

Buffer Areas can meet herbicide label setback requirements and save damage to machinery. Some herbicide labels prohibit application within a set distance of streams, wetlands or a drainage ditch. Installing grass filter strips immediately adjacent to these sensitive areas helps you meet this requirement and avoid the possibility of applying herbicides off label. Since buffers next to ditches help eliminate erosion, you are less likely to damage machinery by dropping an axle into a gully or washout.

Participation in the CRP buffer program and CREP are voluntary and flexible with several different options and practices to choose from. CRP allows you to help determine the width of the buffer strip you install, the types of grass, shrubs or tree cover to be planted, and the length of the contract.

2005 Conservation Buffer Accomplishments

Conservation Buffers Applied in 2005 – 15,955 Acres established on the ground
New CCRP Contacts signed in 2005 – 1,561
Acres of grass filter strip signed up in 2005 – 3,152 acres
Acres of riparian forest buffer signed up in 2005 – 2,389 acres
Acres of Farmable Wetland Pilot 868 acres of wetlands restored
1,955 acres of upland buffer
2,823 acres total
Acres of Field Windbreak – 408 acres

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Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Minnesota obligated nearly $25 million in general Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) financial assistance funds with over 1400 producers. These funds were distributed to 86 of Minnesota's 87 counties with Ramsey County as the only county that did not have any applicants.

In addition, Minnesota also obligated **$200,000** with **13** producers in the EQIP Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program to convert existing center pivot irrigation systems from high pressure to low pressure systems, saving water and energy resources and reducing groundwater contamination potential.

Once again, Local Work Groups (LWGs) were used to prioritize local resource concerns for funding. Through the use of the LWGs and SWCD funding allocations, EQIP has developed strong support, involvement, and participation at the local and State level. Some key highlights of funded practices:

Livestock Related Practices
97 wastewater and feedlot runoff control systems
13 animal mortality facilities
931,000 feet of fencing
285,000 feet of pipeline for livestock watering
32,000 acres of prescribed grazing
122,200 acres of nutrient management
19,000 acres of pasture and hayland planting

Erosion Control Practices
139,000 acres of residue management
61,300 feet of terraces
49 dams and grade stabilization structures
430 water and sediment control basins

Water Quality Practices
9,300 acres of irrigation water management
60,500 acres of pest management
75 well decommissions

Other
314,700 feet of windbreaks
16 acres of wetland restoration
1970 acres of forest stand improvement
450 producers scheduled to use NRCS certified professional Technical Service Providers (TSPs).

$391,000 was obligated in **five** contracts with American Indian producers and tribes. These included contracts with the following tribes: Lower Sioux, Red Lake, Upper Sioux, Grand Portage, and Fond du Lac. **Thirty-one** producers were certified as Limited Resource Producers. These producers, due to limited resources, receive up to 90% cost-sharing to implement cost-share practices.

$870,000 provided in individual producer contracts for participants to hire TSPs to plan, design and check out nutrient management, pest management, and wastewater and feedlot runoff control systems.

Millions of dollars were paid to producers to implement practices in previously funded EQIP contracts. These included contracts from 1997 up to and including 2005.

A new generation of conservationists played a role in planting trees at Camp Vermilion. The forest land was planted by conservationists from a St. Paul Middle School. NRCS has an EQIP contract with the camp on Lake Vermilion in St. Louis County.

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Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

2005 was a banner year for the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) in Minnesota. In addition to receiving our largest allocation to date, the first FRPP easements were finalized in the State. Dakota County, the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS continue to partner on this effort working with private landowners to protect farmland.

$1,548,846 of USDA – NRCS FRPP funding was received in 2005. A competitive Request For Proposal process was utilized and Dakota County was selected to receive funding. The FRPP funds will continue to support their existing farmland protection efforts through the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Area Program (FNAP). Through this joint effort, FRPP funds will contribute up to one half of the cost of farmland protection easements and the county will pay for the other half and other associated costs to secure the easement and administer the program.

This is the third year that Dakota County has been awarded FRPP funds. This includes over **$1.1 million** in 2004 and nearly **$1.3** million in 2003. This brings the grand total of FRPP funding to nearly **$4 million** to Dakota County over the past three years.

In conjunction with the 70th Anniversary of Soil Conservation Service held last spring, Chief Bruce Knight took part in a ceremony commemorating the closing of the first FRPP easements in Minnesota. County and other federal, State and local officials, and participating farmers were recognized for their efforts in making this project a success.

A total of **six** landowners had Dakota County FNAP easements perfected in 2005. This included a total of **637 acres** of which there are **425** acres of prime farmland. The easements utilize FRPP funding and list USDA as having a legal interest in the easement. The easements protect these lands from being converted to non-agricultural land uses.

Additional easements are currently being processed and another Dakota County signup has occurred. Interest remains strong and a number of easements will close in fiscal year 2006. It is anticipated that all of the current FRPP allocation, close to **$4 million,** will be spent before the end of fiscal year 2006.

April 27, 2005 FRPP event in Dakota County. L-R William Hunt, State Conservationist, Jean Sieben, Soil Conservationist, NRCS Chief, Bruce Knight and Michelle Wohlers, District Conservationist, Farmington Field Office.

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Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)

GRP is a USDA program created for the conservation of working agricultural lands. GRP targets the preservation and restoration of grasslands including pastureland and rangeland. This program enhances grazing operations, plant and animal biodiversity, and provides protection for grassland and land containing native shrubs and forbs under the greatest threat of conversion.

A scoring worksheet was used to rank the **102** applications. As in years past there were many more applications submitted than could be funded. Higher priority was given to grasslands that met three criteria: threatened by conversion, managed under a grazing plan and a high amount of biodiversity in the existing predominant vegetation**.**

Minnesota's 2005 allocation was **$1,130,000** and was fully obligated with **36 contracts in 14 counties for 6,920 acres.** The program encourages larger tracts of over 40 contiguous acres. Of Minnesota's **36** contracts, **29** were at or above **40** acres with the largest contract containing **2,207** acres. There were two tracts as low as **19** acres.

A successful selling point for landowners was the ability to choose the length of their contract. Rental contracts range from **ten** to **30 years.** In Minnesota there were **twenty-one 10-year** contracts, **eight 15-year** contracts, **five 20-**year contracts and **one 30-year** contract.

Benefits

Restoring and protecting grasslands help Minnesota's farming communities by contributing to the agricultural economy through better livestock production and forage quantity and quality. Environmental quality is protected with water conservation practices and enhanced biodiversity of plant and animal populations as a result of habitat restorations.

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI)

Minnesota had four full-time dedicated grazing specialists on staff in 2005. In addition NRCS signed a contribution agreement with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to facilitate another grazing specialist through the use of the TSP provisions.

The grazing specialists provided direct planning assistance to **205 producers,** covering **24,971 acres.** They also provided technical assistance to field offices working with producers to develop grazing plans. On-site technical assistance was provided to producers in the areas of forage management, weed control, and livestock watering systems.

Training of Employees and Cooperating Agency Personnel

185 participants received formal training covering Pasture Condition Scoresheet, Livestock Watering Systems, Rangeland Planning, Estimating Forage Production, Conservation Planning and Grazing Systems for Wildlife Management.

Technical Assistance

Prescribed Grazing Systems: Acres Planned **51,028 acres**

Prescribed Grazing Systems: Acres Applied **34,720 acres**

Grazing lands provide vital links in the enhancement of rural social stability and economic vigor.

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Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

NRCS has **eight** approved RC&D Areas covering **64 counties** in Minnesota. A ninth applicant area, Coteau des Prairies RC&D, is seeking USDA authorization as an official RC&D Area. Additionally, four counties in east-central Minnesota have banded together to begin formulating another applicant area, the Mid-Minnesota-Mississippi RC&D.

Councils in Minnesota adopted **49 new projects** and completed **53** during the past year. Contributions from other government and non-government sources toward these projects exceeded **$27 million.** Forty-one businesses were expanded and **82** businesses were assisted financially. Over **150** workshops were held with more than **18,000 attendees.** And, a total of over **84,000 citizens** received service, with almost **28,000** of those individuals being economically or socially disadvantaged people. Projects included two significant *Faith-Based and Community Initiatives* which will result in increased jobs and employment while improving the health and nutrition of people on three Native American Reservations and low income individuals participating in food provider programs.

Environmental education, such as this Soil Day in Three Rivers RC&D leads to a greater appreciation of all things around us.

Soil Survey and Digitizing

Soil surveys provide a field-based scientific inventory of soil resources, including soil maps, data about physical and chemical properties of soils and information on the potentials and limitations of each soil.

The NRCS is the lead Federal agency responsible for the soil mapping of private lands. Many other State and local agency partners also contribute both staff and money to the mapping effort.

Soil surveys have many uses, however, they are intended for people so use of the land fits the soil. Soils data can be used to determine highly erodible areas, potential wetlands, sites where livestock manure could be distributed with little environmental impact, prime farmland, or other soil interpretations critical to natural resource management. Soils data is also useful to urban planners and other government agencies.

Kevin Daw, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations holds the Soil Map for the Last Acre Cermony which took place in Mille Lacs County.

The first soil surveys were conducted a century ago. Just as time has progressed, so has soil mapping technology. The digitizing of soil maps and the development of the soil survey geographic database are an integral part of the soil survey process today. They are completed concurrently with other activities in both initial and maintenance soil survey projects. A soil survey geographic database is one of the products of a completed soil survey. The soil survey geographic database is maintained in the field office and archived at the National Cartography and Geospatial Center.

During FY **2005,** Minnesota soil scientists mapped **1,175,017 acres**, or **113% of their goal.**

The Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO) is the most detailed geographic database. It contains digital data developed from detailed soil survey maps that are generally at scales of 1:12,000 or 1:24,000.

Currently, there are **56** counties in Minnesota that meet SSURGO standards and work is underway on many others. During FY 2005, 1**3 counties (or 6,431,800 acres)** were digitized to SSURGO standards.

All Minnesota county soil surveys that are digitized to SSURGO standards are now available on the web. For more information about soil surveys in Minnesota, click onto the Minnesota NRCS website at: ***www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov.***

Minnesota Technical Service Providers Efforts – A Leader in the Nation

Minnesota NRCS continues to be a leader in the country in the use of Technical Service Providers (TSPs) to accelerate the implementation of the 2002 Federal Farm Bill and other programs. In 2005 NRCS obligated **over $2.1 million** of new funding to TSPs; made an extra effort working with new and existing TSP's to ensure quality technical assistance is being provided and ranked **third** in the country with **235** certified TSPs.

The minimum targeted amount of TSP funding for 2005 was **$1.7 million**, however, NRCS in Minnesota allocated additional resources to reach the final amount of **$2.1 million.** This amount was approximately evenly split between private and public sector TSPs. **Over $1.3 million** was obligated for work tied to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and **$520,000** of work tied to the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

Monitoring of existing WRP sites, along with supporting Minnesota funded Habitat Corridors Partnership project (funding as recommended by The Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources) were key work items in WRP TSP agreements. Funding tied to agricultural waste systems, nutrient management, pest management and forestry related practices were the main focus of EQIP TSP contracts and agreements.

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TSP

In FY 2005, **$425,000** was obligated with Soil and Water Conservation Districts throughout Minnesota to assist in implementing conservation program contracts with landowners. This amount, along with an additional **$700,000** allocated to public sectors, was obligated through the use of Contribution Agreements (CA). CA's utilize partner match of over **$1.1 million** to yield over **$2.2 million** worth of total technical assistance to be implemented.

In June of 2005, the Minnesota State Technical Committee hosted a TSP Forum to gather comments and input from TSPs, producers and others. Excellent comments were received and forwarded to NRCS in Washington, DC for their use. In addition, many of the comments and points are being incorporated into Minnesota processes to make the TSP experience easier and more efficient for both the TSP and the producer.

A number of training opportunities have been completed to educate TSPs and producers on technical and administrative items. Some of these have included: Minnesota Phosphorus Index with University of Minnesota, orientation on the Windows Pesticide Screening Tool, Minnesota Crop Production Retailers Annual Short Course TSP presentations, and the development of TSP fact sheets.

Continual interfacing with TSPs relative to administrative issues is occurring. Final Statements of Work for a number of practices have been completed – these detail the specific requirements to be completed in order to provide technical assistance for a practice. Quality assurance protocols have also been developed and are now being released. Jeff St. Ores, Water Quality Specialist and Minnesota NRCS TSP Coordinator, continues to serve on the Minnesota Certified Crop Advisor Board.

For more information about NRCS in Minnesota, please check out our website:

http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov

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Water Resources

Pelican River Watershed continues to be the highest priority and we anticipate completion of the watershed plan and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) during FY 2006. The purpose of this plan is to reduce phosphorous levels entering Big Detroit Lake. Through our planning and assessment process we have learned the source of phosphorous is not aerobic mineralization as originally hypothesized, rather it is a combination of anaerobic and release from a particularly high source area.

Springbrook Watershed, anticipated to provide ecological restoration of streams in the area and flood protection of adjacent cropland, also proceeds on or ahead of schedule. A visual stream assessment report is nearly complete and will identify segments for restoration, the flooded acres are identified and interviews completed for economic analysis.

We completed two watershed assessments during the past year. The City of Morton was provided assistance to reduce flood damages, and Comstock Coulee provided program options to address their watershed needs.

The Whitewater and Kanaranzi-Little Rock watersheds continue to provide watershed protection assistance through long-term contracting with local farmers. New funds were found for these projects over the past year however, funding continues at a much lower rate than planned for.

Snake River Watershed is scheduled for completion next fiscal year and the City of Warren is already benefiting from flood protection of the off channel storage area. Efforts are now focused on completion of the diversion channel and structure above the city.

Construction on the Snake River watershed continues with the diversion structure just above the City of Warren

The Emergency Watershed Program final report for the southeast Minnesota 2004 flood has been submitted and all planned work completed. Through this project several sites along county roads were protected from eroding away.

Monitoring and investigations sometimes require the ability to walk on water. The crew working on the Pelican River Watershed Plan found at least two ways to do just that. Wait for ice, or roll out some snow fence. And wear boots just in case!

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Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program for people who want to develop or improve wildlife habitat on tribal and private lands. It provides both technical assistance and cost-sharing to help establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat. Minnesota's WHIP plan focuses on the establishment and management of native habitats including at risk species. WHIP contracts are coordinated with other local, state, tribal and federal initiatives which allows the program to reach many more customers.

Minnesota received a total of **112** eligible applications in FY-05, and the dollar value of applications received exceeded **$525,000**. NRCS was able to fund **103 contracts** establishing and enhancing over 2185 acres at a cost-share of over **$475,000.** Practices included: establishment of **1450 acres** of native shrubs, grasses and forbs,· **360 acres** of brush land management,· **314 acres** of prescribed burning,· **428 acres** of timber stand improvement to remove invasive species, **122 acres** of wetlands were restored, **450 feet** of stream bank and shoreline protection, and· **16 acres** of endangered species habitat enhanced.

The goal of WHIP in Minnesota is to maintain a healthy, diverse ecosystem through the improvement, enhancement and restoration of fish and wildlife habitat, in cooperation with private agricultural landowners and to promote wildlife habitat restoration and management on private lands through cooperative endeavors between landowners and Federal, state and local conservation partners.

To maximize habitat and species benefits, WHIP focuses on financial and technical resources towards projects statewide which are a component of a comprehensive plan with the highest demonstratable outcomes utilizing WHIP, to the extent practicable, to benefit State and Federal at risk species.

Program Benefits NRCS has worked closely with several tribes to utilize WHIP in meeting **three** comprehensive Wildlife Management Plans. WHIP has provided NRCS the opportunity to reach non-traditional clients. WHIP has been used to demonstrate the value of non-traditional habitat projects. Examples include endangered species habitat restoration and outdoor environmental education projects.

The Secretary of Agriculture and Secretary of Interior have agreed to the first transfer of WRP Administrative Jurisdiction in Minnesota. Through this agreement, NRCS has transferred all of it's management authority on 2000 acres of WRP easement in the Glacial Ridge Project over to the USFWS. This will allow the USFWS to manage these WRP easement lands without having to consult with NRCS. This is one of the first such agreements in the country. It supports the establishment of the new National Wildlife Refuge at Glacial Ridge, which was established in part through the donation of 2000 acres of WRP easements from TNC to USFWS.

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Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

Minnesota received **$10.1** million in Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) funding in Fiscal Year 2005. These funds were obligated to **33** producers on **6738 acres** in **ten** counties. Of the **6738** acres funded in 2005, two easements totaling **2700** are owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as part of the Glacial Ridge Project.

In addition, Minnesota became the second state in the Nation to receive funds for the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP). The WREP is a 5-year partnership between NRCS and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources in which Minnesota will contribute up to **$1.2 million** in money and in-kind services during the life of the project. In FY 2005, NRCS received **$5.3 million** for WREP and funded **15** easements in Freeborn and Mower Counties and the Manston Slough project in Wilkin County.

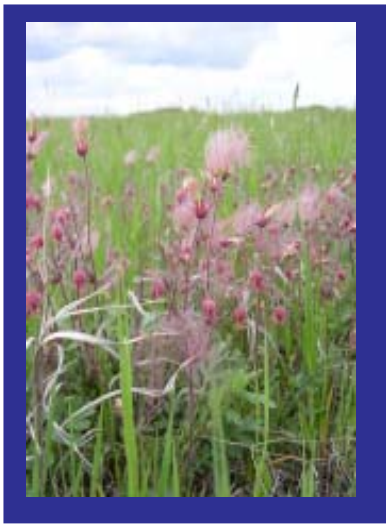
Minnesota led the Nation in 2005 with recorded WRP easements which resulted in **73** easements recorded on **15,600** acres in **19** counties. Of those, 54 easements were recorded on **12,770** acres in **five** of the Habitat Corridors recognized by The Minnesota Habitat Corridor Partnership as recommended by the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources. Other highlights include a 5060 acre easement with TNC at the Glacial Ridge Project in Polk County. TNC also donated land which included **2000** acres of land in a WRP easement to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as part of the establishment of the Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge.

In Clay and Norman Counties, the acquisition of easements on the multi-landowner Ulen Project was completed. This project consists of **eight** easements covering **1266** acres.

In Carver County, a partnership between **three** landowners, NRCS and the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust led to the acquisition of easements on **319** acres along the Minnesota River. The remainder interest was purchased by the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust who will soon donate the land to the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge managed by the USFWS.

Field offices reported **4,186** acres of restoration in FY-2005, including **2490** acres of wetlands restored and **1695** acres of associated uplands restored.

On Earth Day 2005, USDA Secretary Mike Johanns, accompanied by Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty, 1st District Congressman Gil Gutknecht and other State and local dignitaries visited the Grosland Family Farm in Steele County. The Grosland farm is a **189** acre permanent WRP easement. To celebrate Earth Day the Secretary toured the farm and planted native shrubs along with 200 local school children. In his remarks the Secretary emphasized the contributions of NRCS Earth Team volunteers and announced the approval of the CREP II project.



The Prairie Smoke wildflower is one of many native prairie plants growing on the Glacial Ridge WRP project in Polk County.